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John Brown: A Biography Fifty Years After by Oswald Garrison Villard

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## NOTES AND REVIEWS

*John Brown: A Biography Fifty Years After.* By OSWALD GARRISON VILLARD, Litt.D. Boston and New York: 1910. Houghton Mifflin Company. Pp. ix, 738.

In the struggle for the emancipation of the negro race in America, John Brown is the most dramatic figure. No other man in our history has received such extravagant praise and, at the same time, such bitter condemnation. Soon after his death, Emerson acclaimed him a hero; Thoreau compared him to Christ; and Victor Hugo called him an apostle and a martyr. Yet in the eyes of Jefferson Davis he was a murderous abolitionist; Stephen A. Douglas spoke of him as a notorious man "who has recently suffered death for his crimes upon the gallows." The Republican National Convention resolved that John Brown's work at Harpers Ferry was "among the gravest of crimes," yet a few months later thousands of Republican soldiers tramped South singing "his soul goes marching on."

Students and writers have also been at variance in their historical estimate of the man. He has been pronounced by some to have been of unbalanced mind; while others have tried to explain his character by comparing him to the militant Puritans of the seventeenth century. He is difficult to comprehend, for he combined qualities which seem to us impossible of combination. We can understand the inhuman cruelty of his Kansas struggle, when he murdered in cold blood innocent and helpless settlers; we can also understand the deep tenderness of heart when at Harpers Ferry he prayed that his only religious attendants might be "poor, little, dirty, ragged, bare-headed and bare-footed slave boys and girls, led by some old grayheaded slave mother;" and the sublime heroism which spoke out in the words, "I feel just as content to die for God's eternal truth on the scaffold as in any other way." The difficulty comes in trying to

conceive of these opposite qualities in the same man. But John Brown was inhuman, tender-hearted, and heroic—all in one.

He is a unique character in the American history of the past century. But in world history there have been many John Browns. Such a man is merely the natural product of every bitterly contested revolution. Among the extreme radicals of all such movements there have been both men and women who combined his seemingly antagonistic qualities. In the European revolution of the sixteenth century, the Reformation, such were the Anabaptists. They were heroic as they went from town to town preaching their faith in the face of almost certain death; they were notably kindhearted, as they greeted each whom they met with, "the peace of the Lord be with you," yet they were inhuman as they shut the city gates of Münster against fellow Christians and left outside mothers with children in their arms, to die of hunger and cold.

In the English revolution, in the days of Cromwell, and in that in France a century later, this same type is found. Robespierre, for example, was an extreme idealist, who worked for the realization of a perfect democratic community; yet for the sake of his ideal he instituted the reign of terror.

In the recent Russian revolution the John Brown character was not uncommon among the Terrorists. The assassin of General Minn is merely a type of hundreds of others. She was a young woman known to be gentle and tender-hearted, yet she committed a cold-blooded murder. During her trial she said to her judges, "You will sentence me to death. But wherever I may chance to die, in prison, on the gallows, in the mines of Siberia, I shall die with but one thought: Forgive me, my people, that I can give you so little—only my life." This young Russian with her cruelty, her tenderness, her heroism, might well be the re-incarnation of the soul of old John Brown. And men today judge her, as men judged him fifty years ago: some say, she is insane, she is a felon; and some, she is a hero, she is a saint.

John Brown is simply an American Terrorist.

In Rhodes' *History of the United States*, he says: "A century may, perchance, pass before an historical estimate acceptable to all lovers of liberty and justice can be made of John Brown." We venture the assertion that as long as mankind struggles against systems of oppression, entrenched behind state and church, so long will there never be a unanimity of judgment in regard to the character of idealists who use the methods of the extreme revolutionists—the John Browns and the Russian Terrorists.

Another life of John Brown, however, will never be needed. Dr. Villard has given all of the important facts in regard to the man which will probably ever be known, and has presented them fully and fairly, in a sympathetic spirit and with rare literary skill.

G. H. B.

#### SOME INFLUENCES OF RACE-CONTACT UPON THE ART OF PRIMITIVE PEOPLES

One very interesting section of the rather wide field of primitive art is concerned with race-contact, *i.e.*, with the influences, *e.g.*, upon the art of uncivilized peoples, and their children in particular, of contact with European and other civilized races. The literature upon this topic is rather scant, but some of the facts on record may be of considerable importance. By some authorities the effects of such contact have been much exaggerated. The late Professor O. T. Mason (*Amer. Anthropol.*, 1898, p. 356), once expressed the opinion that the well-known skill of the Eskimo in ivory carving and etching had arisen since contact with the whites, and was, as a matter of fact, due to the introduction of iron. It was in connection with the theory that the Eskimo, by reason of their art products, were probably kin to the cave-man of prehistoric France, that Professor Mason asked the question, "Were the ancient Eskimo artists?" and answered it in the negative. To use his own words: "It does not need more than a superficial glance to convince the student that the artistic expression of the Eskimo, in the line of etching, is exactly parallel to the extent to which he has